Dr. Norlyn L. Bodkin

Dr. Norlyn L. Bodkin, 77, of Harrisonburg died September 28th, 2014 at Sentara RMH after a brief illness with leukemia. He was the son of the late Joe P. Bodkin and Nellie Painter Bodkin, and was born in Rockingham Memorial Hospital. He was raised on a farm in Upper Tract, WV. His elementary education was in a two-room school in Upper Tract and he graduated from Franklin High School (now Pendleton County High School). He earned his BA and MS degrees in Biology from West Virginia University and his Ph.D. in Systematic Botany from the University of Maryland at College Park.

He is survived by his wife, Susan Page Showalter Bodkin; two daughters, Marian Bodkin Rabeno of North Beach, MD and Dr. Anne Neville Murphy of Encinitas, CA; and his granddaughter, Katherine Linnea Murphy, a recent graduate of the University of California at Berkeley. Mary Evelyn Neville of Sugar Grove, WV is the mother of his daughters. He is also survived by Page Bodkin’s children and their families, Rebecca and Steve Hanson of Fairfax, VA (with children Ava Rose and Nicolas), and Benjamin Branson Hottel of Harrisonburg (with children Amber, Matthew, Katie and Chloe). Two brothers, H. Garth Bodkin and Joe P. Bodkin, Jr. preceded him in death.

Dr. Bodkin started his college teaching career at Westminster College, New Wilmington, PA in 1962 and later came to James Madison University (then Madison College) teaching in the Department of Biology from 1964 until retirement from teaching in 1998. He taught a wide range of subjects throughout his tenure, with favorites being the botanical field courses. His outdoor field laboratories were distributed from the Coastal Plain in Virginia to the higher elevation and Canadian vegetation at Dolly Sods, WV. Students were introduced to a wide variety of courses including Plant Taxonomy, Flora of Virginia, Plant Ecology, Plant Communities and Plant Pathology. He was always proud that the students loved the fieldwork and that class enrollment was always full.

In 1977, Dr. Bodkin wrote a proposal for the development of an arboretum on the campus of James Madison University. Finally approved by the Administration, construction began in 1985. This was the origin of The Arboretum at James Madison University. He served as Director for the following 15 years and often said that he was a very lucky man, having two full time jobs. Besides teaching students, he thought of the Arboretum as his greatest accomplishment at JMU and he would smile when referred to as the "father of the arboretum". Another botanical facility that he developed is the Department of Biology Herbarium, now located in the Bioscience Building on campus. An herbarium is a collection of preserved, pressed and dried plants mounted on sheets of special paper and stored in air tight herbarium cabinets. The collection of plants has grown from one cabinet in 1964 to over 20 cabinets, currently containing many thousands of plant specimens. Dr. Bodkin's botanical field trip classes and several graduate students collected pressed, dried, mounted and stored the plants in herbarium cabinets over a period of 36 years. This study and research facility is available to students and the public. The collection represents the flora of the mid-Appalachians.

Dr. Bodkin was active in his field of study and belonged to a number of professional societies. He was a member of the American Society of Plant Taxonomists, the International Association for Plant Taxonomy, the Southern Appalachian Botanical Society, the Virginia Academy of Science and others. He was most proud of being elected a Fellow of the Linnean Society of London, the oldest natural history society in the World. He often remarked how enjoyable it was to attend a meeting at their headquarters on Piccadilly Street in London, and especially the post meeting retirement to one of London's famous pubs. He also spent a semester in London while on sabbatical and worked at the British Museum of Natural History in South Kensington separating John Clayton's 1700s collection of Virginia plants from the more than 4 million world plant specimens stored in their herbarium.

Dr. Bodkin led many field trips throughout the Appalachian area for a variety of civic organizations from Harrisonburg and Rockingham County. One article described his trips as "botany at 60 miles per hour". For over 35 years, he was a leader at the Annual West Virginia Wildflower Pilgrimage, where he was a favorite among the flora aficionados. He also led Natural History Studies Tours for students and community members to the Galapagos Islands, the upper Amazon Rain Forest in Ecuador and to western Ireland.

Dr. Bodkin received numerous awards and recognitions over his tenure at JMU including the Society of Landscape Architects Merit Award for Stewardship of the Land, Outstanding Achievement Award for Preservation of Natural Resources of our Country from National Conservation Committee of the Daughters of the American Revolution, JMU Board of Visitors Resolution for the Development of the JMU Arboretum, 1995-96 Distinguished Teacher Award in the College of Science and Mathematics, and the Faculty Distinguished Service Award for Outstanding Service to JMU. In 2006 the Norlyn L. Bodkin Scholarship for Arboretum and Botanical Field Studies was established.  Each year it is presented to a deserving undergraduate or graduate student conducting botanical research in the Biology Department. A new Narcissus (daffodil) variety, 'O'BODKIN' was hybridized and named for him by Brent Heath in honor of the first Director of the JMU Arboretum. Numerous plaques in his honor adorn the walls of Jack Brown’s.

Another professional accomplishment was locating and naming a new variety of trillium, the first named variety of this genus in the eastern United States in over 30 years. An article on this variety was published in "Brittonia" the Journal of the New England Botanical Club. The taxonomic treatment of this variety is included in Flora of North America, the comprehensive multi-volume publication on the vascular flora of North America north of Mexico.

Dr. Bodkin was an avid sportsman, enjoying tennis, golf, skiing, football, and basketball...He loved travel and had been as far as both the Artic and Antarctic Circles. He was a loyal and enthusiastic WVU Mountaineer. But above all, he was proud of and loved his family.

His love of life, family, nature, a large and lively circle of friends, and Guinness was unbridled and infectious.

A memorial service will be held at the Arboretum at James Madison University on Saturday, October 25th at 2pm with a rain date 24 hours later. Donations may be made in his honor to the JMU Arboretum, The Arthritis Foundation, or The American Cancer Society.